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TELEGRAM

June 07, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 2715 - PRIORITY)
TAGS: PREL, PGOV
Captions: None
Subject: UAE FIRST LADY SPEARHEADS CAMPAIGN TO CLEAN THE MOSQUES, LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY UP
Ref: None

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 02715

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ACTION: POL
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0290
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 002715

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/08
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE FIRST LADY SPEARHEADS CAMPAIGN TO CLEAN
UP THE MOSQUES, LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY

¶1. (U) Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: UAE First Lady Shaykha Fatima Bint Mubarak briefed the Ambassador on her personally-designed campaign to literally and figuratively clean up the UAE's many mosques. With her customary extraordinary attention to detail, Fatima has arranged everything from the provision of refrigerators to the need to lock the mosques after the day's last prayers so as to keep troublemakers from spending the night and turning mosques into their safehavens. The campaign, which includes the participation of Al-Azhar notables, also features evening lessons at mosques,

Quran memorization courses and the establishment of a one-year training course on oratory skills for imams. Since the wrenching events of 9/11, Fatima has taken a personal interest in the negative influence of fundamentalism in the UAE. She has worked closely with her sons, particularly State Security Director Hazza, to monitor the country's mosques, schools and judicial system. In so doing, she has earned herself some internal enemies and told the Ambassador she has been the target of at least one smear campaign in an Arabic-language paper published in the U.S. END SUMMARY.

CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS

13. (C) On 5/30, the UAEG launched a week-long mosque construction/renovation and religious education campaign throughout the country's seven emirates. The campaign, titled "Construction of Houses of God Symbolizes Faith and Civilization," was spearheaded by UAE First Lady Shaykha Fatima Bint Mubarak, wife of President Zayid. In a 6/3 private meeting with the Ambassador Shaykha Fatima shared that the campaign had been her personal initiative, i.e. not instigated by one of her six sons, aka the Bani Fatima -- Chief of Staff Muhammad, MFA Minstate Hamdan, State Security Director Hazza, Presidential Court Director Mansour, Infomin Abdullah or Zayid's Private Department Head Tahnoun, who represent a formidable decision-making clique.

14. (c) The UAE First Lady spoke with evident pride about the campaign's success, noting it was designed to improve "performance" at the mosques and included the participation of four imams from Cairo's prestigious Al-Azhar University. Fatima wanted the campaign to emphasize the need for cleanliness and security in the UAE's houses of Muslim worship. For instance, she ordered the installation of refrigerated units at each mosque to provide cold water and instructed that the areas for washing before prayers be kept clean and the mosques be closed and locked after the last evening prayer until the next morning's prayer to ensure that no "trouble makers" camp out. Fatima noted to the Ambassador that undesirables had made a habit of spending the night at mosques and turning them into safehavens. Fatima told the Ambassador that her next goal is to clean up the municipalities; for instance, she wants to replace open garbage cannisters -- which pose a health and security hazard (as people can place dangerous objects, i.e. explosives) into them -- with closed bins.

HELPING MUSLIMS BETTER UNDERSTAND ISLAM A KEY GOAL

15. (U) According to local press reports, the campaign will include the construction and renovation of mosques and an "activation" of their role in society through religious education. The UAEG opened two bank accounts to receive donations in support of mosque construction and renovation. The religious education campaign will be carried out through Friday sermons, evening lessons at mosques, Islamic lectures and seminars aimed at helping Muslims better understand Islam, new Holy Quran memorization courses at 350 Islamic centers, and the distribution of more than 40,000 copies of the Holy Quran. The Ras Al Khaimah Department of Islamic Affairs and Awqaf also announced a one-year training course on oratory skills for 166 imams to help increase their knowledge of Islam.

COMMENT: FATIMA'S INFLUENCE FAR REACHING

16. (C) Fatima has been a key behind-the-scenes player

in UAE decision-making circles, particularly since the wrenching events of 9/11 and the shattering revelation that two Emiratis were among the 19 hijackers. She was among the first UAE leaders to emphasize the need to assess the impact of extremist thought on UAE society. Fatima carefully tracked the leadership's appraisal of the fundamentalist threat, guiding her son Hazza to look at the country's mosques and education and judicial systems. She used her personal relationships with the northern emirates' rulers and their wives to obtain their buy-in of Hazza's actions in their territories. The results have included the unprecedented sidelining of at least 150 individuals, all of them Emiratis, who were deemed to have fundamentalist tendencies. Fatima's latest campaign is very much in keeping with the UAEG's decision to maintain tight control over the country's 500 mosques. This means that no detail is left unaddressed by the First Lady -- from the temperature of the water served to parishioner to the contents of books distributed as part of religious education.

WAHBA